

EXTREME FAITH

WISDOM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Discussion Four:

True Faith Leads to Obedience (2:14-26)

A superficial reading of our passage and some of the Apostle Paul's writings might lead us to see a contradiction about faith and works. Paul said that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Here in James 2 we will read that "faith without works is dead." What is going on? The answer is that each Apostle is addressing different issues!

For Paul, he was proclaiming that non-Jews are welcome through trust in Christ, apart from the ceremonial works of the Jewish law. This is the message of Galatians 1-4. But for Paul, there is no room for cheap grace or excuses to sin: freedom in Christ liberates us to serve one another (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 5:1-6). Paul is opposing religiosity, not righteousness. Sinful humans sometimes become more religious than God commands, adding rules and traditions appealing to pride.

James is opposing an "easy believism" where people were professing belief, but not demonstrating true faith in their walk. Faith, James says, is proven by obedience. Both James and Paul use Abraham as their example. Paul reminds us that Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness before he was circumcised (Genesis 15; Romans 4). James helps his readers see that Abraham's trust in God was proven by the offering of Isaac (Genesis 22).

Opening conversation:

When did the grace of God become real for you and how does God's grace help you walk in obedience?

Reading #1: James 2:14-19

Key idea:

It is not enough to claim faith – we must show it in how we live...and once again, proof of belonging to God is demonstrated in caring for the poor!

- Parallel Scriptures: Proverbs 11:11, 29; 14:31; Galatians 5:6; I John 2:9-11; 3:14-18
- Question: What religious activities do we sometimes boast in to feel better about ourselves?
- Question: What excuses do we give sometimes for our disobedience, whether that be sins of commission (wrong acts) or omission (neglecting things we know the lord wants us to do)?

Insight:

We must watch out for two extremes: legalism that tries to make us more religious than the Bible commands; and license that says because God's grace is supreme, we can do anything we please, and it is all covered. Legalism leads to pride and license leads to laziness – and both are displeasing to God!

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Reading #2: James 2:20-26

Key idea:

Faith is proven by faithfulness and perseverance under pressure, as in the stories of Abraham and Rahab. Notice that Abraham somehow knew God would provide before he placed Isaac on the altar and Rahab believed in the Lord who delivered Israel.

- Parallel scriptures: (Genesis 22:7-8, 11-14; Joshua 2:8-14)
- Question: When has your faith been tested (apart from daily temptations)? What did you learn from that experience?
- Question: Who is a hero of the faith you, inside or outside the Bible? Why do you esteem them so much?

Insight:

King David was blessed by the Lord and from his lineage our Messiah Jesus is born. David's passion for God, bravery, and wisdom are legendary. But his sins were serious, bringing death and destruction to many. He is an example of mercy triumphing over judgement...AND he took responsibility for his sin (Psalm 51) and thanked God for undeserved grace (Psalm 32). God does use imperfect people, but there is never an excuse for rebellion and sin.

Do not wait for feelings to bring change. Ask the Lord for strength and begin practicing the truth – and both mind and body will follow!